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QUAD

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QUAD

A little magazine of literature and art published sporadically by Birmingham-Southern College as a means of presenting the best creative efforts of the student community.

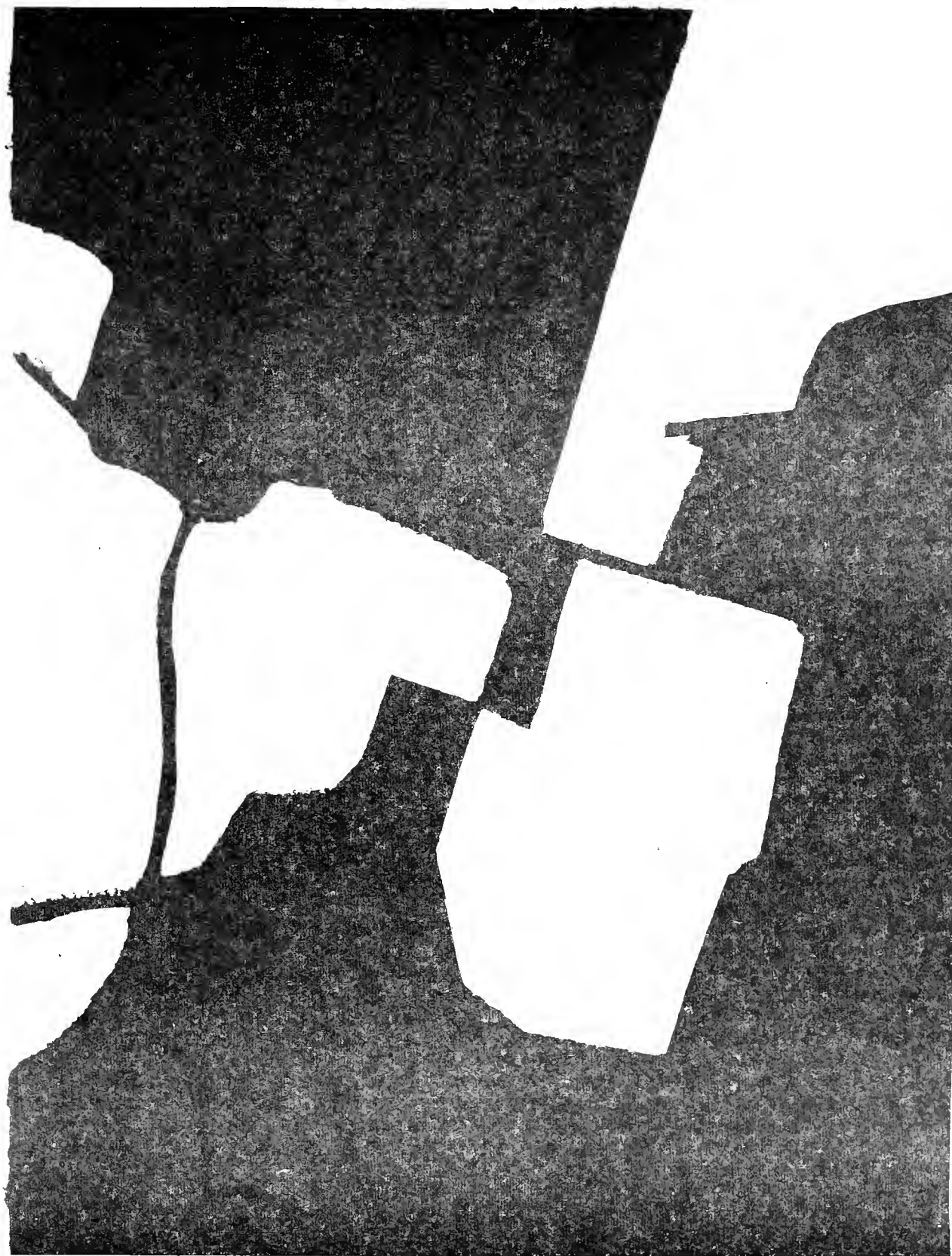
Editor	Wade Black
Associate Editor	Bill Eiland
Advisors	Mrs. Jane Mims Dr. E.S. Ownbey
Staff	Judi Black Alan McWhorter Paul Hyde Alan Zeigler Hild Creed Cheryl Thacker Barry Robinson Ed Peed Reid Byers Jim Flowers Bill Roberts
Varityping	Jan Rawlinson
Printing	Mrs. Martha Thomas

In addition to the above, I would especially like to thank all the members of the English Department of Birmingham-Southern College, who have helped me greatly with my work.

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The Editor for 1969-70 is Bill Eiland. I wish him luck and pleasure. He now has the Albatross.





BORDEN'S LAST FLING

Dicky Stanford

Fans were trickling into the park already, and in half an hour the stands would be packed. It was the last game of the season for both teams, but for the hometown Phillies this game meant the pennant.

A late September wind blew briskly from right field as I sauntered alongside the box-seat barrier toward the right-field bullpen. Snapped up tightly in my blue Cub windbreaker, I'd decided not even to warm up today. I hadn't pitched once since I'd come up from Shreveport to the Cubs three weeks before; so, probably my only job that afternoon would be to anchor down one end of the bullpen bench again and watch the game from the vantage point of a fan in the worst box seat.

I hated bullpens like the one in this park that were squeezed in between the foul line and the box seats. In the first place, there isn't room enough to sit without actually feeling the ball zip past your nose when somebody's warming up. You spend half your time wondering whether the next pitch is going to brain you. Then there's always some goon behind you that has to get chummy with a ballplayer; so, he leans over the railing and blows his hot air into your ear. Inevitably the bench is too short, and if the relief strength of a team consists of more than four or five pitchers, then each one has to hunt himself a hole between two others and wedge himself in. Times were when a few of us would give up in desperation and pry ourselves loose and sit on the ground by the wall.

Such was the extent of the action I had seen in the major leagues. Harry Stickles, the manager,

had said that I'd probably need a little more experience before I was ready for the big leagues; but with the Cubs dragging along in eighth place, thirty-eight games out, and with just three weeks left in the season, I'd figured that I would see a little action in relief and maybe even get to start one or two games. Stickles must've had other ideas, though; he'd stayed with the regulars the whole time, and by now we were in last place, forty-seven games out. The losing wouldn't have been so bad if I'd had my chances like the other guys, or at least all the other guys except one, Sax Borden. Borden was the only other pitcher in the same boat. He was a real card: well over forty, pot-bellied and half-bald, but still hanging on in the majors. I guess you might as well have called him a has-been, because that's what he was, especially when you compared the present Sax with the young pitching prodigy of the late forties.

Borden had been rooming alone until I came up to be his roommate. We were quite a pair, with him being twenty years older than me. He'd kind of taken me under his wing, and we did just about everything together. This included getting to the bullpen early before the games each day; this particular afternoon he already was there with legs and arms crossed, his jacket collar turned up and and hiding half his ear, and his hat perched forward on his head till there was just an inch between the bill and his nose to look through. He was leaning back against the wall, gazing out at the empty field and the scattered fans. I plopped down and joined him.

"Well, Noojin, what'cha gonna be doin' with yourself after today? You headin' home tonight?"

I chose to answer the second question. "No, I'm flying home tomorrow. When you going?"

"Six o'clock tonight, whether this game's over or not." He waited an instant, then repeated, "Six o'clock tonight."

The seasons must have been getting longer each year for Sax Borden. He'd been talking about the end of this season the whole time I'd been with the club and no telling how long before that. In fact, just about everything else he talked about, on or off the field, was something other than baseball. He didn't seem to hate the game, it's just that, if he didn't have that uniform on, I would've guessed by his face that he was some rude somebody had dragged to the park who knew nothing about the game, who didn't care to know anything about it, and who never had been more bored in his life than by watching it.

Borden uncrossed his legs, leaned forward, and put his elbows on his knees. He was preparing to go through a little routine that had become a trademark of his early in his career. It consisted of a tip of the cap with his right hand and a swipe of his hair straight back before he lodged the cap back on his head. The motion once had been slow and deliberate, especially as the fingers of his left hand plowed through a mass of black hair, and the hat traveled all the way to the waist before it came back. But now the head of hair was over half gone, and Borden had modified the removal of his cap until it was little more than a flip of the wrist.

The Phillies had come on the field and were warming up—not just the starters, but the entire team. They were up for this game obviously; no club comes from fifth place at midseason to first without having to fight all the way to the season's end. They'd taken over first place earlier in the week, had dropped behind the Pirates Thursday, but had narrowed the margin to a half game behind with a victory over us last night after the Pirates had lost the last game of their season. A win for the Phillies would mean the pennant; a defeat would lose it. This was "The Week's Big Game" on television, and cameras were scattered throughout the park to get the action from every angle.

A few Cubs were now coming out of the dug-out, either to throw or to head toward the bullpen. I glanced back at Borden, still staring at the other side of the park. He hadn't batted an eye! The

picture of one well over the hump, I thought. Not many today remembered the young Sax Borden. What I knew about him myself was what I'd learned as a little fellow, when Sax was coming back from Korea. The newspapers had given him big spreads then, outlining his exploits as a young Phillie rookie back in '46, fresh from Saxapahaw, North Carolina, who had a "fireball", defined as "a fast-ball too hot to handle." He had won twenty-one games for the Phillies that year, most of 'em right here in this Philadelphia park, and his arm kept firing until late in the '50 season, when he was called into the service. That year the Phils, the old Whiz Kids, won the pennant, but Borden missed the World Series

by a month. Still, he had won nineteen games. Three years passed before Borden was back in a Phillie uniform, and from the newspaper talk it sounded like he was going to pick up where he left off. He didn't, though. His "fireball" was gone; in fact, he didn't even have a "good" fastball. He changed his style, working on curves, change-ups, and sliders; but he wasn't the same Sax Borden. Not once in the following seasons did he win even ten games. In '59 the Phillies let him go to make room for some younger pitchers, and for the next eight years Borden declined steadily even as an effective relief pitcher, wearing the uniforms of four different teams. Why wasn't he in the minors? One thing had kept him up here: his control. He might not have had his stuff any more, but he could put what he did have anywhere he wanted. Bookkeepers don't keep records on the percentage of men walked; but if they did, Borden would be a superstar today, commanding what he wanted. He didn't walk one man in a hundred, and if the whole pitching staff couldn't buy a strike, then it was Borden who came in and settled things down. The Cubs hadn't had that particular problem this season, however, and Borden had made only four appearances, winning none and losing one. Over a month ago, in his last appearance, he developed a chronic sore arm because he hadn't warmed up in so long, and the arm was still hurting him.

It seemed to me that a fellow like Sax wouldn't mind talking at least about his earlier days, but he never had talked when I was around. I'd heard that when he did talk about the old days, he would tell yarns. A few of the players said that one night earlier in the season he got to telling about his old Philadelphia days, but then he started telling tales about how he had discovered a wind draft in the stadium and how he'd made all the hitters hit right

into it. Then he'd tell about all the tricks he had played on the manager until everybody knew it was a waste of their time to listen, and they had gone to bed and forgotten about Sax and his yarns.

I'd just turned my head to observe how both decks already were thick with fans, when I got my first shock of the day.

"It'll be good to see this damn park finally get filled for once." I whirled my head toward Borden just in time to see the last words flow from his mouth. Looking over at one of the bleacher entrances where the crowd was coming in, he leaned back against the wall with his arms crossed again. "One of the greatest Phillie teams ever. Bah! They don't come near the Whiz Kids. You 'member them, kid? Ashburn, Konstanty, Simmons, me? They won't never have another team like us. That David they got—he ain't no hitter. Simmons or me both could'a blown him over 'fore he could even get his bat around. I still can, if Stickles would just let me at him. He ain't got no sense, either." I agreed with him there. "Naw, they gotta set off firecrackers and rockets ever' time some boob hits a homer for 'em, and they have to have Family Day out here every other game to get somebody to come see 'em. They're runnin' a circus; they don't know how to play baseball. We used to have to turn 'em away in the middle of the week."

Had I not just been thinking of young Sax Borden, I might have been bowled over in disbelief like the rest of the guys around seemed to be. There was something familiar about this little outburst. I must've had a mighty queer expression on my face as I sat there staring at him and trying to figure out what it was. Borden looked at me curiously and blurted, "What's the matter with you, Noojin?" I swallowed meekly and smiled.

The Phils were starting their ace, Bob Hiller, a lefty who'd won twenty-two games. Our ace, who had won nine and lost thirteen before the series with the Phillies, had lost his fourteenth last night. We were going with a left-hander, too, by the name of Jones, but I won't tell you what his record was.

Except for the excitement because it was a pennant game, the contest surprisingly was a pitcher's duel from the beginning. For six innings the only action worth looking at was the fielders' running to and from the dugouts. A few hits were scattered around, but neither team had had a man as far as second base. I got my second shock along with everybody else in the top of the seventh. By

a walk, an error, and a bloop single, we had loaded the bases with just one gone. Then little Johnny Evans, our shortstop, came up and squared around to bunt the ball. The Phillie third baseman, getting the jump on Johnny before the pitcher had even let go of the ball, was about ten feet from the batter when he saw Evans start to swing away. The line shot would've taken the guy's head off if he hadn't ducked in time. Anyway, Evans got a triple out of it, and when the Phillies came up for their half of the inning, they were behind 3-0. It was one of the biggest innings we'd had all season.

Cub fans hadn't had much to get excited about during the season, and they probably weren't even tuned in on television unless they were rootin' for the Phillies. If they were watching, though, I bet right there was when they got bit by the same spoiler bug that had just bit us. Fans all around us were wailing, and we ate it up. Borden, who hadn't come out with anything as good as he had that first time, was still dishing out some choice lines, both to the players and to some of the heckling fans who remembered him. Once he stood up, turned around and found one very vocal fan, and shouted something about the Phillies being a bunch of clowns. A minute later somebody called Borden "a Phillie has-been reject," and I grabbed Sax just as he started to lunge over the barrier into the box seats. Somebody on the bench picked up the bullpen hot line to the dugout and told Stickles he'd better cool Borden down. Sax got called to the phone, he listened, and then he slammed the receiver down, adding Stickles to his list of verbal bulls-eyes.

Jones held up for two more innings, but then, in the ninth, he followed through in our traditional Cub style. He walked the first two batters, hit one, and gave up a single. The single didn't score but one man, so the bases were loaded with no outs, and the tying run was on second. The place was going crazy. If there was one thing I'd learned never to do, it was to let a defeated team even get the smell of victory and, worst of all, to do it in their home park where those nuts in the stands could smell it too. The bullpen phone was ringing. Borden, still sitting by the phone, jerked it off the hook. "Yeah," he shouted above the noise. He listened a moment and hung up. The rest of the bench perched forward to see whether Johnson, Norman, or Merritt had gotten the nod. It always was one of those three when the game was tight. Sax glanced back at them with a dazed look on his

face. "The guy's crazy," he yelled, "He wants me."

That was the crusher; we all gasped. What the —. Sure, we had nothing riding on this game. We could win it or lose it. But, heck, we had to try to win it. Stickles never really had seemed the sentimental type, and he never had been buddy-buddy with Borden. Okay, good for Stickles; it was good that he wanted to do something like this for old Sax. But to do it was something else. Borden already was pumping away. In his wind-up he looked like he was going to throw it through the catcher, but what followed was a floating "eephus" pitch that almost didn't make it to the catcher. We settled back in disbelief. Not Borden! Not with his arm that far gone! Jones would have to hold 'em and stay in there.

Jones, however, would not oblige. He walked the next batter to score another run and put the tying and winning runs both in scoring position. He got two strikes on the next hitter, but then proceeded to throw four straight balls to let in the tying run. It was 3-3 now, and the fans already were perched on the railings, ready to flood the field when that runner on third crossed the plate. Harry Stickles called time out, emerged from the dugout, and trudged slowly toward the mound with his head down. When he reached the foul line between first and home, he glanced toward the bullpen to signal for the reliever to come in. Just as he turned his head back toward the mound, he whirled around to look at the bullpen again and then shot back to the dugout.

"Yeah," I answered into the ringing phone. I'd fallen over two of the others to be the lucky one to hear this.

"Where's Johnson?" Stickles blasted into the phone.

"On the bench. You wanna speak to him?"

"Hell no! Has he warmed up?"

"Naw, you wanted Borden."

"Borden! I said Johnson, you idiot. Who answered that thing awhile back?"

It hit me then. "Borden," I mumbled weakly as I gulped.

"Well you tell Borden —"

I broke in to tell Stickles that I couldn't tell Borden anything. He was already on the mound.

"Has anybody else warmed up? Anybody at all?" he wailed.

After I told him no, it sounded like he broke the receiver as he slammed it down. Considering that Borden had sent Jones to the showers himself

before Stickles could get out to the mound, and considering that all this was on Diz's "The Week's Big Game" for the nation to see, I think Stickles handled it real well. Although he was out of it all by now, he still looked like a major league manager in charge of the whole situation. The boss man back in Chicago would just have to believe that if Stickles would have any hope for keeping his contract. If Stickles was telling old Sax something important on the mound, I don't think Sax was listening too closely. By now, he'd changed his image as a bench jockey completely, and now he had to change his image as a pitcher.

The man at the plate was Ham Davis, the left-fielder who had belted fifty-four home-runs and broken all Phillie records, but who wasn't "no hitter" in Sax's eyes. Sax looked out at the right field roof and started his wind-up. It was just like the one in the bullpen minutes before. Davis rocked back before the ball left Borden's hand so that he'd be ready. When the ball came down from the arched path of the "eephus" pitch, Davis was completely off stride and had to let it go for a called strike one. Borden took the catcher's throwback, looked again at the right field roof, and immediately began his windup again. Davis was ready this time, and the pitch was almost perfect—high and inside. He connected, and the ball shot out toward the right field roof like a rocket. The crowd jumped to their feet, with mouths open and voices shouting. The ball rose higher and higher, but suddenly, just as it reached the apex of its arc, it took a deep dive to the right and went foul just before it sailed over the roof. Shoulders and mouths dropped simultaneously all over the stadium. Stickles must have fainted by now, I thought.

Borden had a new ball and was eyeing the catcher for a signal. Which one it was didn't matter, I'm sure. He toed the rubber, looked back up at at the right field roof again, waited two or three seconds, and then stepped off. Everybody in the park was looking at that right field roof now. Who was up there? What was up there? The lights on the roof reflected sunlight real well; this I found out when I first looked up and almost blinded myself. I shaded my eyes and looked again, seeing in addition only some ragged pennants hanging by their poles. I looked back at Borden. He was to the side of the mound rubbing the ball, his back was to the plate, and his head was still facing the right field roof. I was thinking that maybe it was some fan in the upper deck when Sax stepped back up the mound to toe the rubber again. He wound up,

and what followed, I'll swear, was the exact same thing that happened before. Davis murdered the pitch, once again it rose high and far, and once again it rose high and far, and once again it shot off to the right before it went out of the park.

That's when I saw it. That's when chill bumps ran up and down my spine. My head, in following the ball, stopped where I easily could see those ragged pennants blowing in a gust of wind that nobody could feel because it blew high above the highest baseball fan in the park. The baseball would have to be hit above the roof, though, if a pitcher were to take any advantage of it. The wind wouldn't do a pitcher any good, however, unless he could make a hitter foul off so many that the law of averages would make him miss one. He'd have to pitch it where he knew a batter would hit it up there, and the batter would have to be do this, the pitcher would have to have perfect control and have to have it on every pitch.

I looked back down on the field. Once again Davis gave it a ride, and once again Borden got a new ball to replace the one fouled over the roof. The sequence happened three more times, and then they began booing Borden. It was not Davis that they booed, not the ball, and not the wind that they didn't even know was blowing. They booed Borden.

"Throw it, you ol' has-been!"

"Can't you throw your fast one no more?"

"Why don't you put it down the pipe, Borden?"

"He'll murder it."

The crowd had had its say. Borden kicked a deeper hole for his spikes, he toed the rubber, and then he crouched. I couldn't see his face, but I do know that the part of the crowd that could see it suddenly quieted down. Holding the ball behind him, he gave it two or three deliberate wrist flips and then began his pump. He rocked back, swung his arms over behind his head, kicked high, and came crashing forward, every ounce of strength in his arm and in his body momentum thrown completely behind the force of the ball.

It was right where Sax wanted it, right where the fans wanted it, and right where Ham Davis wanted it. The ball soared in a straight, rising line going at the roof this time. It was like a bullet from a rifle; it was still going up when it soared over the roof.

I thought at first that Borden was lost somewhere in the mass of Philly pennant celebrants. He had gotten to the dugout before Davis had even

rounded first, however, and was in the clubhouse the whole time I was searching for him, both to save him and to console him. When I did find him in the clubhouse, he was stripped to the waist and downing a bottle of champagne. The drinks had been furnished for the Philly pennant celebration, but the delivery boy must have taken a little nip himself before he got to the park, as he'd brought them to the wrong clubhouse.

"Boy, did you see that home run go!" said Sax. He slapped me on the shoulder with his left hand. "Hell, Davis didn't have to hit. All he did was stick his bat out there and get the luckiest break of his life—my fastball. My old fastball, Noojin. They called it the fireball back then, and it was the fireball today. I really flung that, huh? I'll make me a fortune at dinner-speaking now, Can't you see it, Nooj? Sax Borden, the one who threw Ham Davis the pennant-winning gopher ball. I ought'a be real popular around Philly, huh? I ain't never gonna throw another one like that." It was then that I noticed the slumped inactivity of Borden's right arm and shoulder. He'd flung it all right, but it was the last fling that that arm would ever make.

He hopped off the training table and walked over to the corner of the room where Harry Stickles was talking with the lone reporter who had accompanied the team from Chicago. "Shrewd move by ole Stickles, huh?" Sax smiled amiably at the reporter and turned to meet Stickles' cold stare. "Three cheers and a hip-hip for Harry Stickles; he's our man." As a toast, Borden raised the bottle high over the manager's head and then smoothly proceeded to pour the contents on Stickles. He handed the bottle to the reporter, walked to the shower stall, then looked back to me: "Hey is it six o'clock yet?"

FOUR POEMS

I

The old imperial bows
his hoary head,
huffing, squalling—
a flurry of clamor.

II

Exuberant, spriteful, full
of hope, nymph-like
in her beauty, Persephone
flies on the warm South wind.

III

With cloven hooves and
fiery chariot, Helios descends
scorches the earth, and
laughs like the very devil.

IV

Dark-haired, his face a
ruby hue, satyric,
he gallops to and fro,
snatching handfuls of death.

—David Hargett

THE SAD, SAD STORY OF MAUDE E. BROWN

Ronald W. Self

Miss Maudie Brown was eighty-three when the day came that she was no longer able to get up from her feather bed. The doctor came at eight, the mortician at nine, and by ten Miss Maudie, or what was left of her, was gone from her home of forty years and was lying on a cold metal table in a white sterile room of the Wilson Funeral Home. Miss Maudie, if I knew her at all, couldn't have been happier.

Outside Miss Maudie's little brick house a quiet, curious crowd stood in groups of two's and three's, whispering, talking low about Miss Maudie. Everyone in town knew about her. Miss Maudie was as much the town's gossip as she was the subject of town gossip. Not one soul in the whole town failed to perk up upon hearing the news of Miss Maudie's death. Everyone had been awaiting the news for years.

When it became apparent early in the morning that Miss Maudie was dying, the crowd began to gather. At about seven I crossed the patch of grass that separated my house from Miss Maudie's. Miss Maudie wanted me, they said. When I arrived Miss Maudie was sitting up in her bed, propped with pillows, looking as she had looked every morning that I ever saw her. Only this time her eyes were closed, and the bed was surrounded with relatives. Among them Miss Maudie looked like a figure on a stage. Her brother Charles stood looking out the open window by the bed, his hands thrust deep into the pants' pockets of his white suit. In a corner sat his wife, looking rather like

a young Miss Maudie, her eyes closed slightly revealing the darkened eyelids. Other kin sat or stood about the room.

When someone whispered to Miss Maudie that I was there, Miss Maudie seemed to peek out of herself to see if it were true, and when she recognized me standing before her she tried to smile and beckoned with her hand. There was surely something between Miss Maudie and me. I think I was her only friend, though more than sixty years of time separated us. Miss Maudie didn't say much; she couldn't say much. "Remember the day," she said. "Remember the day." A few minutes later Miss Maudie closed her eyes again, and soon the doctor came.

On the day of her death Miss Maudie looked essentially the same as she had looked on every other day of her eighty-three years. She was a little older, a little grayer, a little more stooped, but Miss Maudie Brown had never changed. According to some of the townspeople, Miss Maudie had been born with a set of yellowed false teeth, premature gray hair, and a slight stoop in her short, narrow back. Her hair, which was as grey as sleeping moss, had always been long enough to hang to her waist, although it had always been pulled into a tight knot at the back of her head. If Miss Maudie had ever in her life smiled, no one living knew it. There was a common joke that she had been born with a persimmon in her mouth, and small children were always disappointed when they

saw her for the first time. No persimmon was visible. Miss Maudie was short, five feet three inches, and weighed a pound for almost every year of her life. Her eyes were the color of slightly rusted tin, and when she walked she rather resembled some thousand-legged creature, crawling up the street, head down in determination.

My first recollection of Miss Maudie comes from my early years, but from the late years of Miss Maudie. I had just begun to explore the neighborhood, barefoot, with a pair of faded shorts covering all of me that was covered at that age and season. Miss Maudie's house caught my attention early, it being the only brick house around. I remember eyeing it for a long time before I finally walked up the paved sidewalk (again the only one on the block) and stood peering through the dark screen door. It was then that I first saw Miss Maudie. She was towering before me, looking down at me through what seemed like miles of space, only the screen between us. She must have been watching me the whole time. Before I could scream or run Miss Maudie had me by the arm and was dragging me into her purple parlor. We became friends.

I grew up visiting Miss Maudie. Every day I'd walk up the sidewalk, kicking acorns off it in season, and would push the white button that started the bell ringing. Miss Maudie said she could always tell a considerate person by the way he rang the bell—short. Though I loved to push the button and hear the bell ring, I was always considerate. Miss Maudie and I would sit in big chairs on the sunporch and look at bird pictures. Miss Maudie knew all the birds. We would watch the bird bath in the garden and when a strange bird flew in I'd thumb through the book to look him up and find his name. Then Miss Maudie would read to me all about the bird: where he was from, where he was going, what he ate, and what he did. Once a robin got drunk on chinaberries and drowned in the bird bath. Miss Maudie and I buried him. We wrapped him in a blue paper napkin and put him in a brown cigar box. I dug the hole. Before we covered him up Miss Maudie read a verse, something, about "mount up with wings as eagles," that being the only verse she could find about birds. It was a nice funeral.

Miss Maudie had a piano, and she could play it. She was a professional, or at least she had been a professional. She liked to tell about the time she rode in an elevator with John Phillip

Sousa at the Ralston Motel in Columbus. But Miss Maudie's career as a musician didn't last long. Her father thought it quite improper for a young lady to play a musical instrument in public. He thought women should sit on pedestals. Miss Maudie once told him that pedestals were quite uncomfortable places to sit: "Have you ever tried to sit on a pedestal, Papa?" she asked him. "There's no place to rest your back and no place to put your feet." Still, Mr. Brown put Miss Maudie on a pedestal and made her sit there.

When she was thirteen Miss Maudie tried to run away from home. According to Miss Maudie she left the white-columned prison before dawn and by dark was back within its walls. When she was

twenty Miss Maudie tried to run off with some no-good who passed through town. That journey lasted one day and fifteen miles. Miss Maudie returned with a hurt pride; the wanderer never returned.

Somehow Miss Maudie never quite seemed to fit into our town. Although she lived there all her life, of course, and certainly was well known, Miss Maudie never really liked the place. Many afternoons when Miss Maudie and I grew tired of the piano and the birds and the poems, we would just sit and look at each other, every now and then telling each other something of nothing. On afternoons like that Miss Maudie would begin a conversation that could last—and often did last—until night. She would begin where stories should begin, at the beginning, and would tell me about her mother and her Papa (I never liked to hear about him) and how she grew up. She would tell me about the music she and her brothers would play—Miss Maudie on the piano, Mr. Charles on the trombone, Harry on the drums, and Walter on the violin. Then she would tell me how it was being the only girl in the family, how much she wanted to go to the creek and learn to swim, and how her Papa always said no to her. Then she'd tell about the school she had attended and the girls she had known. Miss Maudie loved the opera and knew all the stories. Sometimes she'd tell me one of them and describe the scenery and the costumes and the handsome actors and the beautiful actresses as she had last seen them. Sometimes she'd pull out her "treasure box", as she called it, and together we'd rummage through the yellowed letters and faded programs of friends and parties long past. Once I saw her wipe away a tear that was running along a wrinkle in her face. But long before the conversation would end,

Miss Maudie would come to the subject that always made me a little sad. "I'm going to die someday," she'd say. "Some day I'm going to die and people will put me in a grey metal box and bury me in the soft brown dirt. And there will be flowers and candies and organ music, maybe even singing." I never could see how she could talk like that, but she did, and as I grew older the subject of her death came up more and more often. Miss Maudie must have started thinking about it then, for soon the rumors started, and everyone came to know that Miss Maudie Brown, my friend, was preparing to die.

The first to hear of the preparations was Mr. Wilson, owner and director of the Wilson Funeral Home, our town's only such establishment. As Mr. Wilson tells it, he received a carefully worded and neatly printed note from Miss Maudie asking him to call on Saturday afternoon. When he arrived, Miss Maudie, dressed in black (she had taken to wearing black all the time) met him at the door and admitted him to the parlor. Miss Maudie sat in the large fan-backed chair and looked him straight in the eye and said, "Mr. Wilson, I am going to die." Mr. Wilson must have been looking at the floor while Miss Maudie talked to him that day, because every time he tells his story about Miss Maudie he mentions the purple carpet. Before Miss Maudie let Mr. Wilson leave he had taken careful notes as Miss Maudie dictated: one black hearse, six white-gloved pallbearers, one grey metal coffin with white silk lining. Indeed, Miss Maudie was preparing to die.

Before Mr. Wilson was down the walk good and in his car, J. Marvin Abernathy, pastor of the Methodist Church two blocks away, was considerably ringing Miss Maudie's bell. To J. Marvin Abernathy, Miss Maudie issued the same directives, adding such necessary details as time of day, day of week, and she may have even hinted at season of year.

Other locals were invited to call. The church organist appeared in silks and that as if she were coming to tea. The funeral music list Miss Maudie handed her as she sat down must have been quite a shock. Two florists called and were asked to make bids for certain floral tributes. Miss Maudie chose the more expensive arrangements. All the chosen pallbearers received hand printed notices signed, "With love and appreciation, Maude E. Brown."

Needless to say, Miss Maudie's behavior shocked no small number of people. Her brother,

upon hearing of the plans, took to his bed and nearly died. After he had recovered sufficiently to return to his store he again nearly died when the florist delivered a plastic memorial wreath to be stored for Miss Maudie's funeral day.

But through it all, Miss Maudie and I continued as friends. Though she was busier than usual, occupied as she was with all the necessary planning that goes into dying, she still found time to sit and talk with me or to stand in the garden as I watered her flowers. She seemed quite cheerful to me, and she certainly was in good health. The day the tombstone was installed Miss Maudie and I walked to the cemetery to watch. The design was simple enough, but the size was impressive. Mr. Red Godfrey, who superintended the installation, looked more ready for the grave than did Miss Maudie. He tottered and shook so badly as he stood by the hole dug to receive the stone that I thought he would fall in, and he would have fallen in had not Miss Maudie been standing beside him, close enough to grab him as he was slipping over the edge.

With all her preparations made, a new white gown hanging in the closet, Miss Maudie sat back to wait. She had a long wait. I went off to college about that time expecting every day to receive the news that Miss Maudie was dead, but every day I was disappointed. Miss Maudie would never die, I came to say, and I was nearly right. I graduated and Miss Maudie still lived next door. Once, home on a visit, I went to see her and found her as always, sitting on the sunporch rocking away the afternoon, two books lying open on the couch opposite her. We talked about the same old things, and she told me about her plans again. She knew I didn't particularly like the subject, but she knew that I was her friend and would listen. Her eyes, looking further away than usual, seemed to sparkle as she described the funeral. Her ideas sounded as though they came from some opera. I thought she should enjoy playing Aida and dying clasped in the arms of Rhadames.

Finally I came home to live, and one day soon afterwards Miss Maudie Brown died. Miss Maudie's plans went into action almost immediately. The plastic memorial wreath, sporting fresh white carnations, hung on the door of Charles Brown's store. Reverend Abernathy had his robe cleaned. In the cemetery, Red Godfrey, Jr., stood by as the truncated message on Miss Maudie's tombstone received its long-awaited conclusion.

The next day, the day of the funeral, was like all other days in late summer. The sun was a

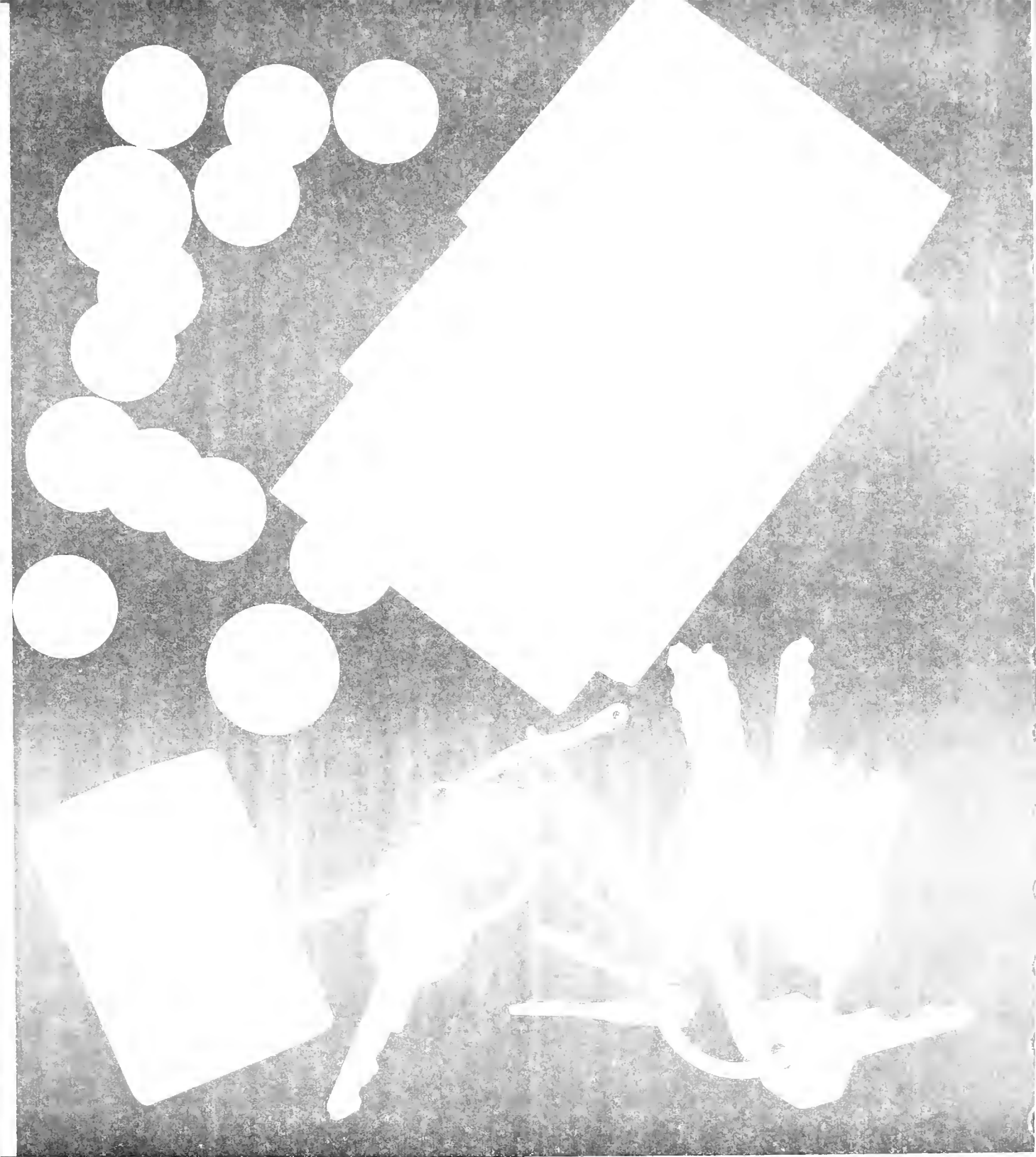
little too hot, but there was a wind blowing from the south. In Miss Maudie's garden a few late-blooming nasturtiums flowed to and fro, bending with the wind as they had bent with the force of Miss Maudie's watering. A few lonesome sparrows and a cat-bird hung around the bird bath waiting on Miss Maudie to put in fresh water. Through my kitchen window I could see Miss Maudie's sunporch. A relative from somewhere sat in Miss Maudie's big chair, but with her back to me it seemed as if Miss Maudie were sitting there.

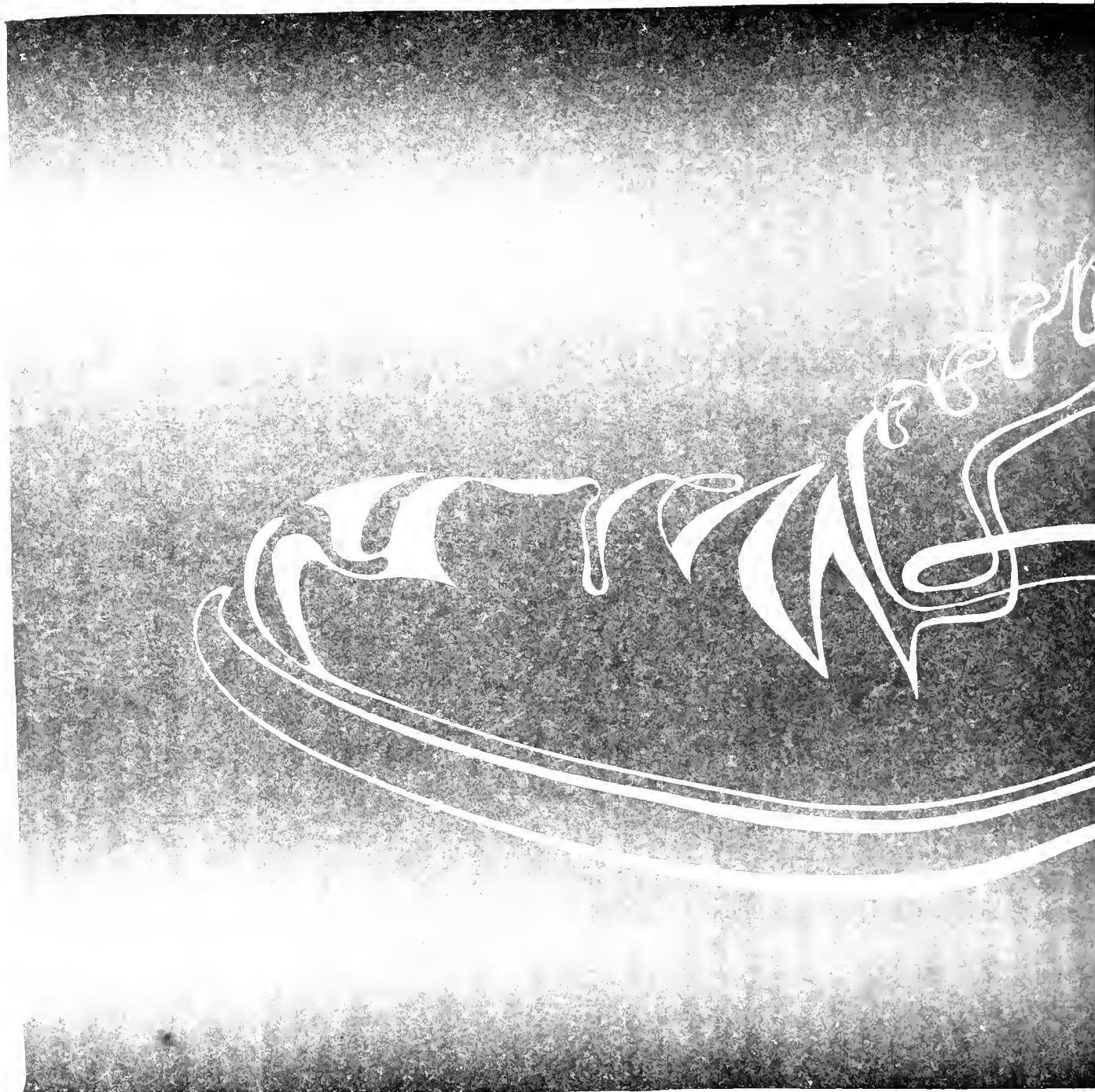
At three o'clock that afternoon, Saturday, as Miss Maudie had planned, the funeral began. Everything was as Miss Maudie had wished. Mr. Wilson's black hearse stood at the curb dripping air-conditioning water like saliva from under its hood. There was organ music, low and ubiquitous. The church was packed. Flowers decked the altar and surrounded the organist, alone in an ocean of blooms. The heavy-looking cross hanging over the pulpit seemed to point to Miss Maudie lying there in front of us all.

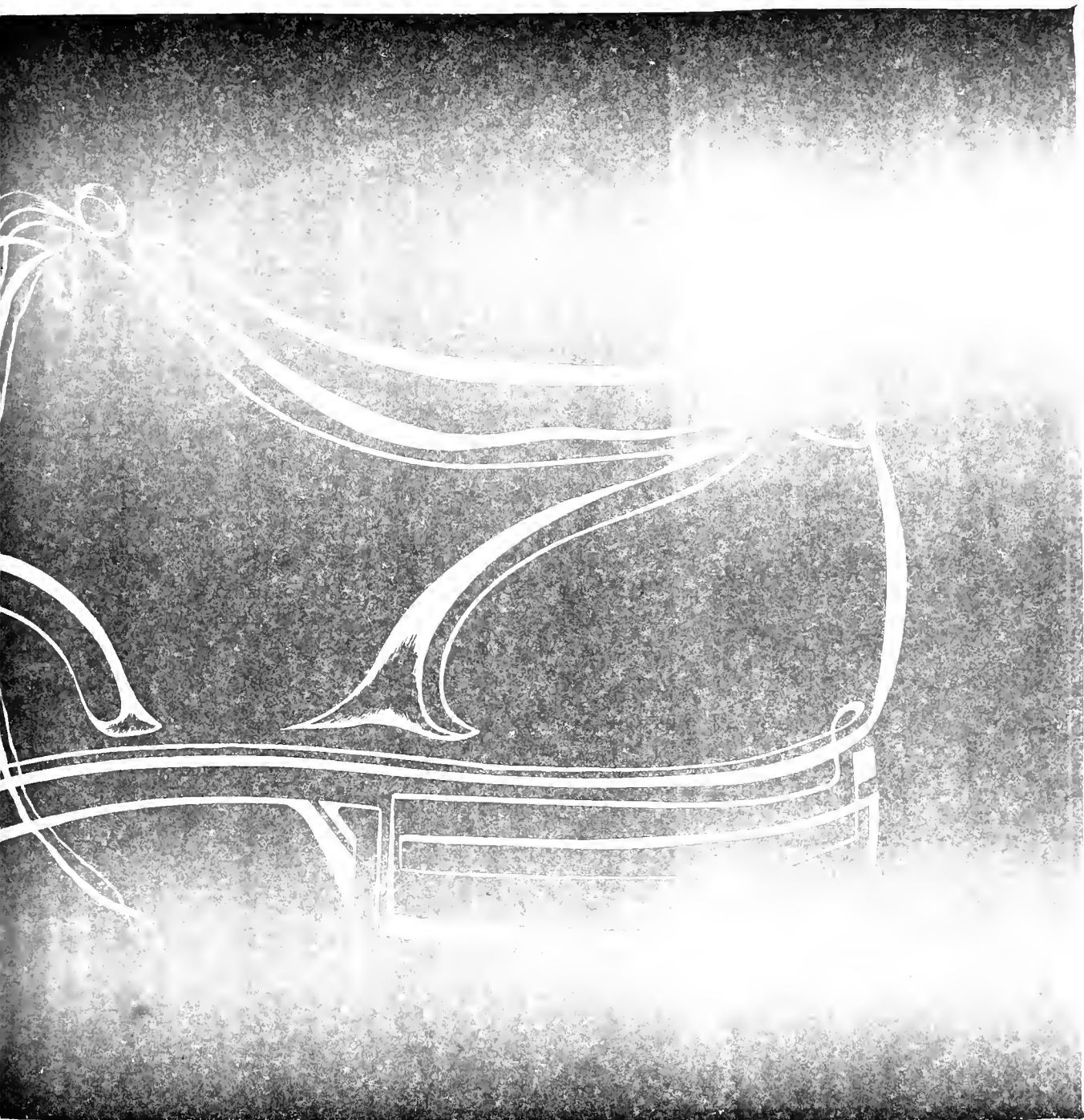
The casket was open, but I already knew how Miss Maudie looked—like a gray bride in her white gown. No need to look now. Then Mr. Wilson closed the box; there was a quiet squeak—Miss Maudie?

It was hot in the church. Heat waves from the candles hung about the tips of the flame, unable to climb. Drops of silver perspiration stood on the forehead of the minister standing black in the pulpit behind Miss Maudie's casket. I could hear bumble bees in the flowers. I wasn't really sad, but I wasn't comfortable. It somehow just didn't seem right, Miss Maudie being up there in front of all those people, lying quiet in the silk-gray box. My mind kept going back to all the other times I'd been with Miss Maudie: we ate vanilla custard by the tool shed in her backyard; we pulled weeds in her shrub garden; we tried to play a Schubert duet; we cut roses and pressed out the

sweet oil. The flowers in the church began to make me sick. I looked around at all the familiar faces, attentive to the eulogy going on. Sitting where I was on the second pew, I could look to one side and see the stained glass window. There was so much light streaming through it that I couldn't see the design in the window. Beams of dust floated in the slanting light over the heads of the people and down to the gray of Miss Maudie's coffin. "Remember the day," I heard Miss Maudie say. "Remember the day," and then I saw on the head of Miss Maudie's casket, a butterfly as it lifted its golden wings to drift up into the multicolored light. Then I remembered the day, the day Miss Maudie, standing in the green of her backyard, pointed to a butterfly and said to a little boy, "Someday that's what I want to be. Someday, that's what I'll be."

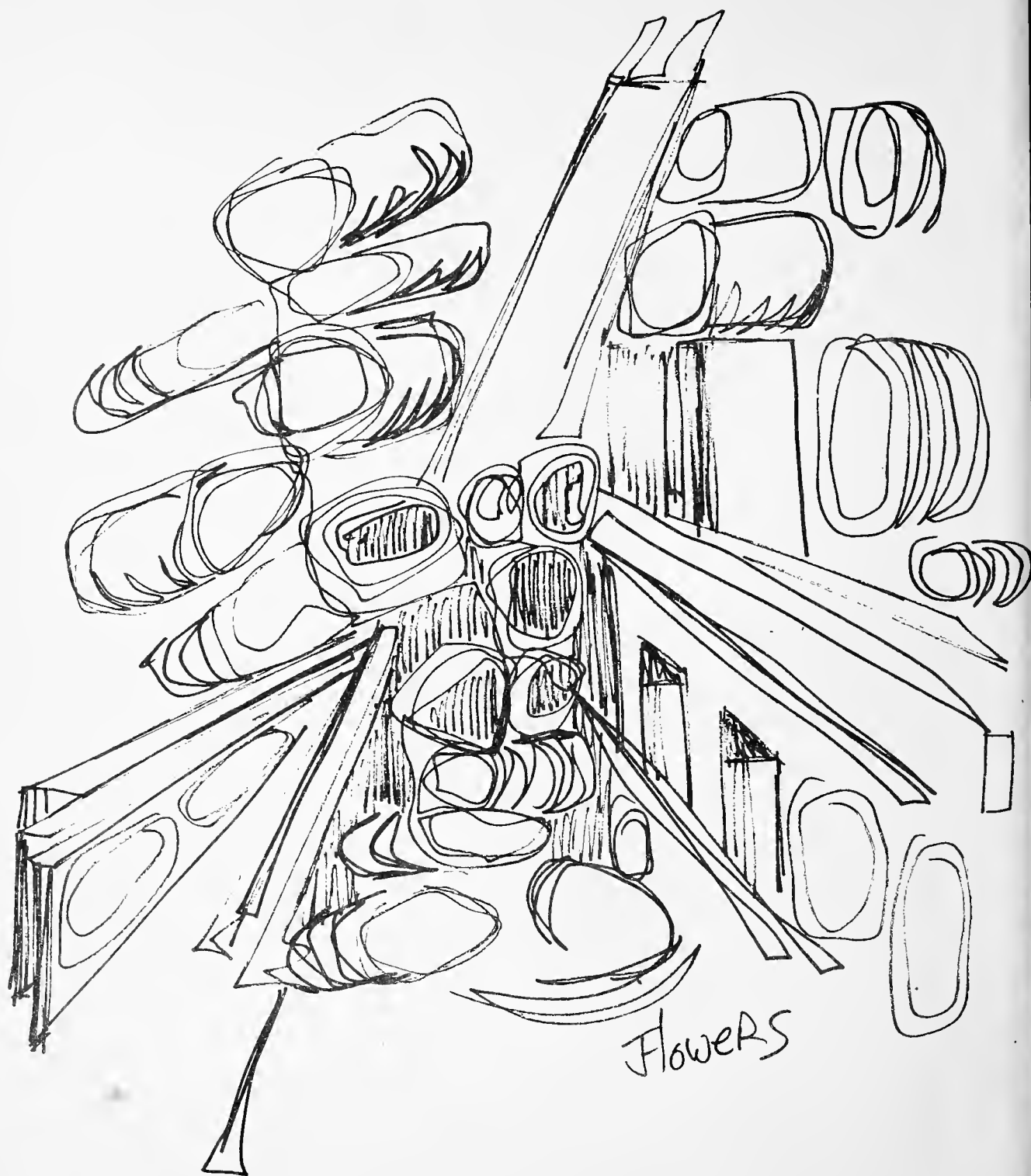












THE ACCIDENT OF A DREAM-HAPPENING MAN

(A prose sketch)

Caryl Johnston

For the past five years, Mr. Towner had dreamed a total of four hundred and forty-three dreams. He knew that this was so, because he had gotten into the habit of waking early and writing them down before breakfast. The dreams had begun circling around him when he had gotten launched in his career of mathematics, and shortly after he presented his thesis they started crashing into him like meteorites. Back before the beginning of dreams he would eat a hearty breakfast, with bacon, eggs, pancakes, fried apples, and the like; but as the dreams came on over the years, leaping and mounting like a series of cascades, breakfast dwindled to a cup of strong black coffee, which he would take with trembling hands. His thesis had been well received, even commented upon; but that did not change the fact that he was still teaching arithmetic in elementary school. He did not blame the dreams on this account; but at times he did worry about how thin he was becoming. He saw himself being nibbled at by voracious dreams. This, he realized, was a fantasy; but at other times he saw himself as an under-paid and ill-fed city garbage-collector, tottering under the weight of four hundred and forty-three pounds of garbage he had to collect during the night. This was a recurrent image of himself, but one which was well enough, as he had always had a certain amount of sympathy for garbage-collectors. One terrible night he confused the garbage-collector with a grave robber, and saw himself inside a pyramid staring at golden cats and wine jars and conversing with a mummified impassive prince. Of all his dreams he loathed that one the most.

One morning, after a night in which he had not dreamed, Mr. Towner started on his daily walk to school. He was pleasantly surprised by many different things at once. He passed a crowd of schoolgirls all in green uniforms, looking like a crop of silken-haired corn. They did not turn their gaze, but waited patiently and silently for the school-bus. In fact Mr. Towner remembered being struck by their silence. He noticed the doors of houses and cars opening and shutting as men with briefcases hurried out. He knew that they would all converge at the doors of certain buildings like a multiplicity of lines meeting at one point. Trucks drove by, making a lot of noise; but Mr. Towner only concentrated on hearing himself walk. There was a regular interval between one step and the next, and this he carefully measured. He walked in two-four time. He passed a drugstore and a gas station with a church wedged in between, and vaguely noted the advertisement about next week's sermon. He enjoyed reading advertisements, but sometimes the church ones bothered him with the sense of something having not been completed. He hated an unfinished or incomplete proof. To complete the proof he imagined that he had thrown a large circle about himself. The point was to figure out how to take in the slack rhythmically so that the circle would always retain its perfect shape while steadily diminishing in size. He decided upon three-four time while he turned the corner.

As he turned, he bumped into a man carrying a chain and muttered an apology. The man still looked mad, but the hopeless thing was that

the circle had gotten all tangled up. It slumped above him, twisted and knotted; and Mr. Towner realized with horror that it could never be untangled and restored to its original perfection in anything approaching a reasonable time. He longed to throw it away, and stood still for a moment, imagining that he was stroking some woman's tangled hair. It was not until he glimpsed a trash can nearby that he laughingly dismissed the whole problem.

He had reached the end of the business district and approached the residential area. This part of the walk he enjoyed most, for the streets were quieter and allowed for better calculations. The trees were turning a little pale with the approach of winter, and leaves, drained of color, shook to the ground like whole wheat flour through a sifter. Also at this point he generally switched to four-four time. Now, however, he became concerned about the proof of parallel lines. He put them at the starting point like two racehorses, and mentally fired a blank. As he walked, counting the time, he watched them lengthen over the trees and elongate into the sky. He glanced at his watch and decided to give them sixty seconds to cover the galaxy and another three minutes or so to cover the universe in case it was round. In the event that it might have an end, he decided to allow them six minutes for the round trip. In any case, he would have ample time to prepare a comfortable stable for their return home; and he imagined that a huge stable the size of a football arena, built entirely out of stained glass, would do the trick. Loudspeakers blared and there were jockeys everywhere and thousands of people who wore the look of the American Mathematical Society, cheering and wildly dedicating themselves to Euclid. He would be ready to receive them when they came dropping, always equidistant, out of the sky. The one thought that bothered him was that they might not return. The arena-stable abruptly melted as he worried frantically about the fate of his two pet parallel lines. The only thing to do was to follow them and try to bring them back. He heard a dog's loud bark and felt himself flying on the back of the two lines, speeding down the inner space of a cone which appeared, like a trick of vision, to be bottomless yet with an end. As he spun slowly down the cone, he chanced to look up and saw, as if it were many years ago, stars flickering and parading as if in

a medieval pageant or morality play. The whole stage revolved in a dignified manner and each player performed a set part as he passed by. All of the players wore masks, and no player ever took off his mask; but after a long interval might exchange his mask for another. All were brightly dressed in antique styles, and seemed to be speaking a type of poetry. Gazing up at this spectacle during his slow spin down, Mr. Towner remarked to himself that it looked like a celestial version of the city of Venice, or at least the Venice he imagined that he had seen in pictures, a bright city somehow miraculously balanced over dark and bottomless seas. Enchanted, he looked on, until he became aware of an overpowering thirst. Being sucked down the cone reminded him of falling out of ice cream, and ice cream always made him thirsty. Suddenly he realized that not only was there no water to be had, but also that he had arrived to the bottom of the cone, and that

arrived almost to the bottom of the cone, and that in all likelihood he was to be deprived of the universe in the space of a few more revolutions. Some teenagers floated past in a red convertible, drinking cokes and popping bubble gum, when he felt with horror that his foot had crashed through the bottom of the cone. He clung desperately to the sides and tried to tell how the four hundred and forty-fourth dream had come home, but the words drowned in a vacuum of silence, and all that seemed to him remaining in the world were two streaks of light, fading into the eyes of the day.



MONCEAU

None can feel a stranger to the parc Monceau;
In song and paint it was all imagined before.
Like beings summoned from impressionists' dreams
Move shapes of mother and child on the water's edge,
And young men with their pipes and fledgling beards
Let fall their books from a world not here
And sit reflecting the green waters of longing
While flocks of pigeons beat into the air
Sounds heavy and hurried with the stirring of wings.
Children no higher than a birdcall's shrill
Play at the day when they too will walk tall;
But arrested like time grown suddenly chill
They watch as black swans sail slowly the waters so proud
Like ancient boats, when seas were big and the times were loud.

—Caryl Johnston

CATENARIES

The grey scum skimmed the pool;
like lichen it was.
The young and green leaflets pushed it up,
hung it like lace strung from their tips
in graceful arcs.

—Barry S. Robinson

"SOMETHING LIKE MAD SPRING"

In the spring of madness
a loping flower
pours its perfume
across the highways
that I travel,
a soaring mad fragrance
seethes through all my sensibility
like the whisk of an intoxicant
through the bloody streams of my soul;
A pouring madness
pails its gushes
of incredulous perception
through the systems of my complex,
through the complexions of my system.
The nectar of a single flower
gallops like madmen
racing through a black tunnel,
racing to an unseen light,
to the sound of a silent horn
racing with reverberating footsteps
down an infinite hall
with no doors,
(my madness springs)
with thousands of doors and windows
opening onto gardens of paradise,
opening onto ballrooms,
opening onto cathedrals
with massive spaces
stained with the divine,
hushed with devoted reverence,
sanctified with smoking incense pots.
In the spring of madness
I leap through green meadows
and sacred wood glens
that whisper to me
in non-verbal tongues,
in refined and primitive tongues,
in the touch of a swinging spider's strand
against my face.

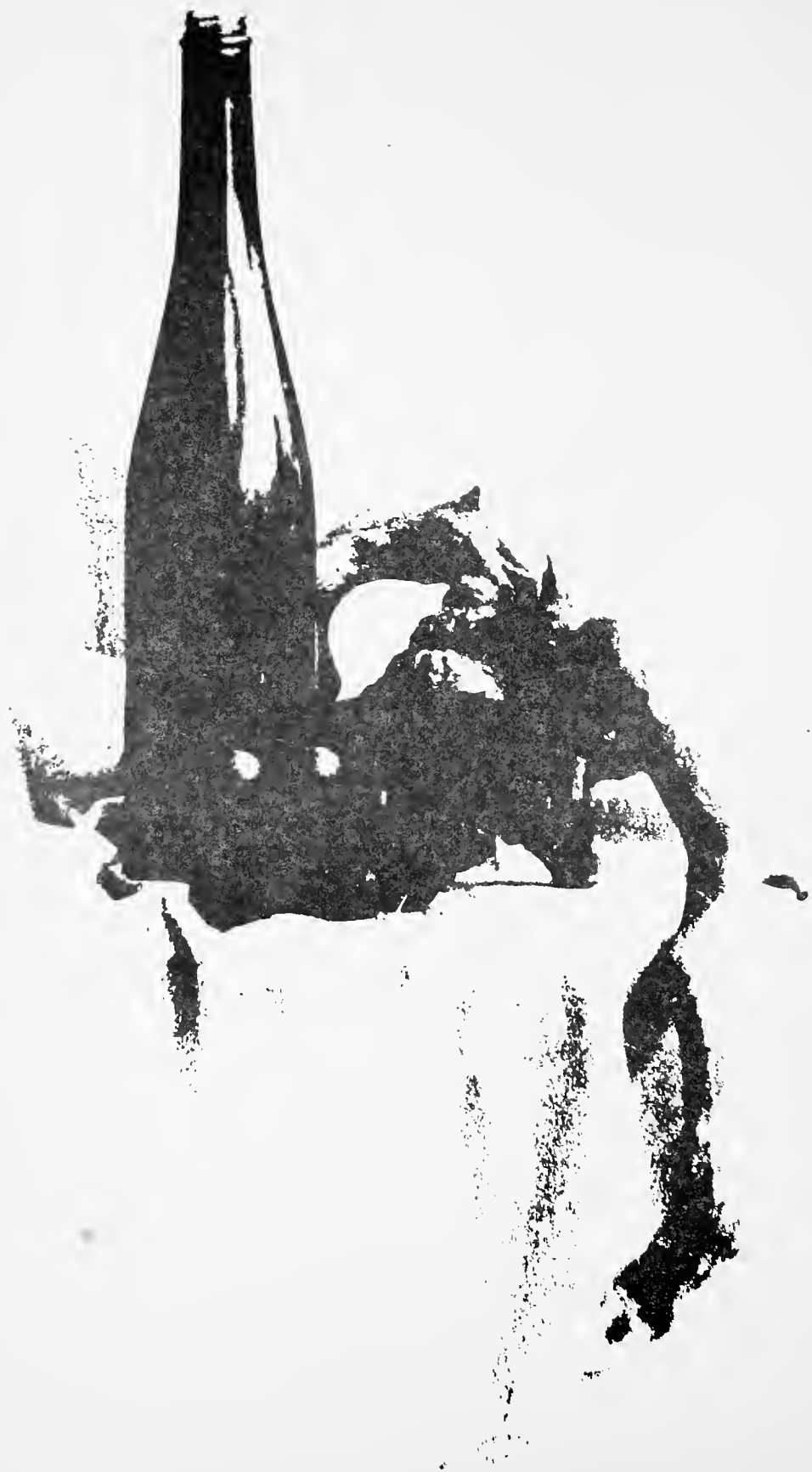
In the spring of madness
the skies part in cracked oblivion
waiting for the second coming
of pure and elegant government.
And my secretary dictates
her inner-most thoughts to me:
her idolatrous dreams and her appetites
and the fact that her nails break off
before she can cut them.
The spring of my madness
seethes and blooms
in sensible splendour.

—Jerry Andereg

FROM FUTURE POETS

From future poets I hope to see
Poems of great simplicity,
Which, like the rules of children's games,
Are not elaborate but suffice.

—Wade Black



THE DEATH OF UNCLE EDWARD TABB

Ben Windham

Aunt Lucy Crenshaw wore the biggest bustle that I had ever seen. When she paraded about the house, the bustle swayed threateningly from one side of her expansive behind all the way over to the other side and then back again. To look at her, you might have sworn that some playful pet had somehow become lodged in her skirt and was looking desperately for an exit. But I knew that this was not so, because I had seen the bustle, and, besides, Emmett Simms and Cleopheocus, the maid's son, had talked me into stealing it one time to use for a catcher's mask when we played ball. When Aunt Lucy found us (I was catcher at the time) her face was as red as my fannie was all the next day. But that didn't stop her from wearing it after she had Cleopheocus fix the dent in the wire where Emmett had accidentally hit it with the bat.

At the time, Aunt Lucy was in her late fifties. She had been through three husbands and was looking for No. 4. The first one had died of mumps and the second was killed somewhere over in France during the Great War; I never knew them. But Uncle Daniel Crenshaw had more or less raised me. They had made me an honorary pallbearer at his funeral, which was the first one that I had ever been to. I was too young to go to the funeral when my father died. I never even knew him well. From what I was told by mother and Aunt Lucy, he was just a normal person who worked hard and lived clean, his one dubious distinction being that he was the first victim of an automobile accident in the state of Alabama. But, as I said, I never went to his funeral. If Uncle Edward Tabb, who was really a great-uncle, but we always considered it too close

to make the distinction, died as every one expected, his would be the second funeral that I would have been to before my eleventh birthday. Emmett had only gone to one and Cleopheocus didn't count because everybody knows that Negroes spend all their spare time in going to funerals, weddings, or baptizings.

Uncle Edward Tabb was not rich, but he was one of those people who are classified by others as "well-to-do"; that is, he made enough to live pretty comfortably and had a little left over every month to put in the bank that he and Uncle Daniel had founded in Westover. He was always good to me, and when he retired from the business a year before, he gave me a ten-dollar gold piece. Gold pieces were as scarce as hen's teeth in Alabama in 1930. "Hold on to this boy," he told me as I winced under the weight of his massive hand. "You might need this someday."

"Yessir," I replied as I wheeled to leave. I wanted to get out as quick as I could so I could show that ten-dollar piece to Emmett and Cleopheocus. Neither of them had any gold coins, though Cleopheocus had a gold tooth that his grandfather had given him for good luck. But old Uncle Edward was reluctant to let me escape easily. Since he had given me ten dollars in gold, I figured that I owed him whatever attention he wanted, or at least two or three more minutes of it, anyway.

"We've got some hard times coming on," he continued as his hand tightened on my shoulder to let me know his intentions. "Look at me." His light blue eyes that could dance and sparkle when he took his "tonic" and puffed on his big Havana cigar could also be as cold as the gunmetal of his

old twelve-gauge shotgun when he came in early from hunting ducks on the Tombigbee. His eyes were cold like that then. They made me tremble a little bit, but I didn't dare look down. It was sort of like talking to God. I guess when I thought of God I always thought of Uncle Edward with his long white beard and his light blue eyes and his gold-handled walking cane. One time when I was in Miss Fulton's Sunday School Class, I drew a picture of God and it was all I could do to keep from putting in the walking cane.

"Do you know what a depression is, boy?"

I was scared to tell Uncle Edward that I didn't, but I didn't want to lie, so I shook my head.

"Well," he said, taking his time, "it means you won't be seeing too many more of these gold pieces. Hold onto it, boy, because there's going to be a depression. Some folks claim one has started already."

When he was silent for a while, I thought he expected me to answer him; so I said, "Yessir," while I scuffed one of my shoes against his roll-top desk. He laughed (at me, I guess) and said, "Now, goodbye. And remember what I told you," and holding my cap in one hand and the gold in the other, I flew out of the back door and down Water Street toward the house. I lost the gold piece two months later while we were playing pirates, but I never told anyone except Cleopheocus about it. I inducted him into The Order of the Black Hand. He rolled his white eyes when I told him that the Devil would come for him at midnight if he ever told anyone. I made an X in the ground and spat in it and then Cleopheocus spat in it and that sealed the bargain. I had to tell someone about losing the gold piece, but if old Uncle Edward (or anyone else, for that matter) ever found out that I lost it, my hide would have had to be patched if I was ever to sit down again.

But Uncle Edward was dying now and I couldn't get it in my head. I guess I thought that, like God, the old man possessed a sort of immortality. But when Dr. Cassidy came out of Uncle Edward's room, I knew that the old man was going to die. Dr. Cassidy was looking at the floor, and his lips were pursed like he wanted to whistle, but he didn't. Aunt Lucy must have known what Dr. Cassidy would say, but she asked him anyway; women are like that.

"Is there any chance for Father?"

Old Dr. Cassidy just shook his head and acted like he was making sure that his bag was locked good while Aunt Lucy stood trembling,

bustle and all, wanting to cry but not wanting to. Then she asked in a tiny little voice so soft that I had to bend out to hear it, "How much longer will he . . . will he . . ." Dr. Cassidy finished fumbling with his bag and straightened up and then looked Aunt Lucy straight in the eye. "It'll be a miracle if he lives through the night."

Aunt Lucy went to pieces and threw herself on Dr. Cassidy, who just stood there in his white linen suit and his little moustache, patting her on the back and looking straight ahead at the door, and I knew as well as he that he wanted to get out. But Aunt Lucy was slow. She kept on hugging him and crying, "Oh, how he's suffered! When I think about how he suffered!" The doctor would say, "Yes, yes, now Miss Lucy," and then he would pat her some more, and everytime he thought that she had just about finished, he would try to lift her, but she would start bawling again, so he finally gave up and just stood there until she was cried out. Aunt Lucy took Dr. Cassidy's handkerchief (like his suit, it was made of fine linen) and she blew her nose and dried her eyes.

"Now, Miss Lucy, you can only make him a little more comfortable. Keep putting those ice compresses on his head." Aunt Lucy started to quiver again. The doctor stepped for the door, paused, and turned. "That's all you can do for him now." He grabbed his hat off the rack and, pulling the door open, said, "God be with you." He closed the door and swiftly exited, looking down at the walk, but stepping swiftly just the same.

Aunt Lucy began to cry again. Mother came up from the sofa and held Aunt Lucy and whispered little things to her that women say when they try to comfort each other. Mother turned to Mr. Vincent Tate, whom I had just met that day for the first time and who was my uncle, too. Mr. Vincent Tate had come all the way down from South Carolina when he heard that Uncle Edward was dying. Mother told him, "Will you take the boy until Lucy and I decide what to do?"

Mr. Vincent Tate, or rather Uncle Vincent Tate, seemed more than glad to leave for a few minutes. He had a little silver flask that he carried in his coat pocket and he kept drinking something out of it. I think it must have been whiskey. I caught him off guard, so to speak, while he was squinting his eyes. He wiped his mouth and was screwing the top on the flask when he looked down and saw me. He must have known that Aunt Lucy didn't approve of drinking whiskey because he handed me twenty-five cents without saying a

word.

Now he got up from the sofa and unconsciously but ceremoniously ran his hand over each side of his greased black hair which was parted dead center down the middle. "But, of course, my dear," he said. He bent down and planted a dry little kiss on the brows of both the women. Then he motioned to me, and I got up, and we walked down the hall from the parlor and toward the back porch. Passing Uncle Edward's room where he was probably lying asleep (since we didn't hear any screaming or moaning like we did when he was awake), we stopped before we got to the kitchen (where I knew Mimey and Cleopheocus would be). Uncle Vincent Tate reached out to touch the old clock that sat on top of the bookshelf that lined the hall. Mother had told me that the clock had been in the family for a hundred years, even before Uncle Edward was born. It was in fine working order. At bedtime, when everything in that old house got as quiet as the First Presbyterian Church on Saturday night, the clock would ring out each hour so loud that you'd have thought it was right under your bed. You had to hurry up and get to sleep before it rang again on the half hour. Doing quarter-hour shifts, it could keep you awake all night long. It was a nuisance, but it had to be tolerated because Aunt Lucy thought of it as a family heirloom. Everybody knows you don't hide or give away heirlooms. So we just put up with it and hoped that it would rust or break or something, but it never did, much to our disappointment and insomnia.

Uncle Vincent stroked the mellowed, dark brown wood and pulled open the little painted glass door. He watched the pendulum swing back and forth for a while. Then he closed the clock up. "Damn fine clock," he muttered to himself. He turned to me. "This is a pretty good clock, ain't it?"

"Yessir," I said. I knew.

He was looking again at the clock. Pulling open the door with the picture of the little boy and his dog painted on it, he watched the pendulum some more. "Damn fine clock," he said again sort of under his breath and in his mustache. "Bring a pretty penny." He frowned as he closed the door. Looking back over his shoulder, he pulled out the little silver flask and tipped it up. He uttered a soft grunt, wiped his lips, screwed the top back on and looked at me. "Wasn't it two bits I gave you?"

"Yessir."

He hustled me down the hall, past the kitchen and out on the back porch, where we sat down side

by side in the swing. He pulled out his flask two or three more times, and I just dangled my feet and wished I wasn't there all dressed up and all like it was Sunday.

When Mother came for me she came so quietly that Uncle Vincent and I didn't hear her at all. Uncle Vincent was just reaching for his flask again when she came out the door and called me. "Wood," she said.

Uncle Vincent was so startled that he almost fell out of the swing. He jumped up and straightened his black wool coat and said, "My dear, you—ah—startled me."

Mother either didn't hear him or chose to ignore him, for she continued speaking to me. "Wood, you stay with Uncle Edward while Mr. —ah—Cousin Vincent drives me and your Aunt Lucy to get Aunt Sarah. Just sponge Uncle Edward off and put those ice compresses on his head until we get back. He's asleep, but if he gives you any trouble, just call for Mimey; she'll know what to do."

I sat there with my mouth opened while she turned to Uncle Vincent. "Come along, Cousin; we haven't time to lose." She walked out with Uncle Vincent grumbling softly behind her.

I was scared. I just sat in that old swing until it stopped squeaking. When their footsteps moved down the hall into the parlor and out the front door, I got up and walked over to the screen door and started to open it, but my hand just froze to the handle. I realized then that I hadn't ever been that scared before, not even the time I broke out the preacher's window the day I skipped church to play baseball. I had never seen a dying man; and, besides, I had always confused Uncle Edward with God. I didn't want to see him weak and bedridden. And most of all, I didn't want to be there when he screamed in pain from the fever. I had heard him before, of course, because the fever had struck Uncle Edward many times. He had recurrent malaria, though we didn't know to call it that then. Uncle Edward had contracted it years before, during the War, not the Great War, but the War Between the States (Aunt Lucy had taught me never to call it "Civil War", which is common folk's language).

Uncle Edward Tabb had joined the Confederate Army in 1864 when he was sixteen years old. He was captured two months later at Fort Morgan after the Battle of Mobile Bay. Transferred to Ship Island, off the coast of Biloxi, he was held a federal prisoner and was guarded by Negro soldiers. There he caught yellow fever.

Now, the malaria fever came and went in

fits. When it struck him hard and made him delirious, he would start to talk in long, rambling, disconnected sentences saying something about Ship Island. He would curse the black guards and call out the names of long dead comrades. Sometimes he would start to scream. It was a terrible thing to hear in that old house, especially when it was late at night. The boards in the floor would be creaking and little currents of air would be moving all about and you'd be thinking you'd heard things . . . that you didn't ever want to see and suddenly he'd scream. That scream would haunt the aching old house like a ghost. I'd sit up in the bed, clutching hold of the sides, and the little hairs would slowly rise all the way up my back and, and my eyes would be searching but not seeing anything in the night.

Well, that's how I was feeling then. Those little hairs were slowly rising up my back while I stood with my hand on the screen door. Its creaking seemed to shatter the afternoon silence as I opened it and walked in as quietly as I could. I began to smell all sorts of odors that I had never smelled before: the musty, rotting smell of the wood and the decaying odor of the dirty volumes that lined the bookcase. But there was another scent that hung in the hall, that permeated the woodwork, that filled the old rotting house. I had never smelled it before, but I knew by some strange animal sense exactly what it was: it was the smell of an old man dying in a rotting house. I bit my lips and concentrated so hard on shutting out all of my senses that I forgot to even look in the kitchen to see if Mamey and Cleopheocus were there. I stopped at Uncle Edward's door, drew a deep breath of that foul house air, and went in.

The heavy old curtains stretched hotly drawn across the faces of the windows and the room was heavy and oppressive with the still weight of the air. As I gently closed the door, I noticed the fine-grained dust particles swirling as they floated in the shaft of light. They reminded me of the snowflakes that I had seen falling the winter that Hal's Lake had frozen over. I watched the tiny shaft of light shrink and finally disappear. Feeling the latch click, I groped my way over to the bedside and sat down stiffly in the straight-backed chair that stood ready for anybody that had to watch the bed and the old man. Sweat was pouring down my face. I gingerly got up to remove my coat, which I hung on the back of the chair. Then I sat down.

The old man was lying there like he was

dead, but he would occasionally wheeze and sputter. I began to think that he might be dead and that I only thought he was wheezing. I felt a weight on my head and shoulders as if something might be sitting on them. I was sweating again. Leaning over, I cocked my ear to see if I could catch a sound from the old man, and as soon as I bent over to where I thought his head might be, his mouth flew open and he started snoring so loud that you'd have thought you were in a sty with fifty hogs all grunting at the same time. I was so scared that I just stood there bent over the bed for I don't know how long. All sorts of crazy thoughts ran all around my mind like they were chasing each other. If I had dared, I would have followed my impulse to grab that old man by his beard and pull him up out of bed and tell him to shut up or ask him if it was all right for me to leave. But I couldn't have done that even if I was crazy, I feared the old man so. Instead, I drew back and tiptoed over to open the window and let in some air. But I remembered what Mother had told me about letting air into a sick person's room, so I tiptoed back to the chair and sat down. That heavy feeling began to ride all over me again. Although I promised myself not to do it, I began to think about ghosts.

Mamey had told me that if a ghost (she said 'haint') ever jumped out from somewhere like behind a bush while you were walking home at night and if he wrestled you down, the thing to do is to think about Jesus. "Keep yo' mind on Jesus, and don't think nothin' 'bout nobody but Jesus, an' 'fo' you knows it, the haint be done gone." So I started to thinking about Jesus. One time in Sunday School Miss Fulton had shown us a picture of Jesus standing on the mount and preaching to the apostles. Well, I thought about that as hard as I had ever thought about anything, but I kept getting Uncle Edward's face where Jesus' should be, so I quit. The heavy feeling was pressing in on me so bad that I started shaking. Then I got to thinking about Jesus walking on the water. That seemed right, because it was Jesus' face that I saw this time, and not the old man's. So I thought about that for a long time. Sometimes I would have Jesus walk to the ship, and sometimes he would walk away from it, and then sometimes he would walk all around it, keeping to the water. I thought so hard about it all that I began to nod a little. The hot dust had stopped up my nostrils, and my head was very warm and everything was going slow.

"WHO'S THAT?"

I jerked up my head and saw Uncle Edward sitting up in the bed. The words flew from me before I could think. "It's me, Uncle Edward."

"Nigger boy, you Yankee soldier, you come one step closer, and I'll dash out your damned brains to Kingdom Come!"

My heart was pounding so bad that it sounded like an exploding kettle drum. My ears started ringing, and the room was swimming. I wanted to run somewhere but my legs wouldn't do what my head told them. I sat thunderstruck in the chair. There was a lump in my throat as big as a baseball.

"Uncle Edward, it's me, Wood . . ."

"NO! DON'T TOUCH ME! GET AWAY! GET AWAY!"

I sat stone still. I didn't know what to say or what to do. The old man was still sitting bolt-upright in his bed. He began rolling his head.

"Sir, prisoner No. 5 requests water. Water, sir. Water, if you please."

"Uncle Edward, I don't . . ."

"JESUS PLEASE GIVE ME WATER! FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, SIR, WATER!"

"Uncle Edward, it's me, Wo . . ."

"LET ME OUT OF THIS DAMNED HOLE! LET ME OUT!"

I couldn't move or even think. It seemed as if the world had stopped. We sat there face to face in the hot, black, dusty air and it seemed as if all time had exploded and everything had ended and was coming crashing down. We were rooted, both of us, like sailors on a sinking ship who know that the end is near and that there is nothing to be done but face the end and be done with it. But, suddenly, through all that time and space, I heard the old clock begin to strike. It rang in the hour mournfully and painfully, like a funeral bell.

"AAAAAAGGGGAH!" screamed the old man.

I sprang up. "MIMEY! MIMEY!" But the old clock struck again, drowning out my voice. In my raging brain I saw only one image that repeatedly burned itself in my mind: the clock. I knew I had to destroy that old clock. I started off toward the door, but the old man thrust out his hand and gripped me so tight that I thought my arm would burst.

"NO! DON'T LEAVE ME!"

I struck his arm as hard as I could. "LET ME GO!" The old man screamed as the clock continued to strike. "DON'T LEAVE ME!" I

turned mad in the hot blackness and sank my teeth into the old man's flesh. "AAAAAAGGGGAH!" he screamed as the hot blood spurted up from his old withered arm. "DON'T . . ." He pulled his bleeding arm toward his body without releasing his vise of a grip. "You've poisoned me!" he gasped. I was blind. I drew back my fist and it found its mark as I struck his face, for he fell back heavily onto the bed. Frantically, I pried his fingers from my arm and ran enraged and terrified into the hall. The old clock sat silent on its perch. I leaped for it, bringing it crashing down to the floor. For an instant I stood there in the blinding sunlight as my power and rage gave way to my terror. The tears came suddenly and I ran down the hall and collided with Mimey. My arms flailed about her huge body as she held me tight against her bosom. She enveloped me, captured me, and finally I went limp and cried—cried, because they had left me there alone and made me go there and sit with him and because it had been hot and dark and I had to hit him and break the old clock and it was all done and all over and finished. Mimey never said a word. She just held me there and rocked me slowly back and forth in her great arms.

Finally we heard footsteps. Mother and Aunt Lucy and Uncle Vincent and Aunt Sarah stopped talking the minute they saw Mimey and me just standing there. They just stared at us. All of them, even Uncle Vincent must have known what happened.

"Mister Edward dead." Mimey spoke it without emotion, but just standing there in the late afternoon heat. The three women filed slowly by into the room. Uncle Vincent walked to the door and stood there looking in. Mimey gave me a big squeeze and released me as Uncle Vincent stepped aside to let her enter.

I stood up against the wall. Uncle Vincent quietly moved from the door. Stealing a glance at me, he snaked down the hall to where the broken clock lay dead on the floor. He stood over it a moment and then turned to me, his eyes furious. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but abruptly closed it and, wheeling, he walked silently from the house into the evening. I brushed my hand over the shattered glass door. The little painted boy's face had been cracked into a million pieces. I waited for the women in the cool night air.

